

Crisis Education Project Profile

March 2005

Project: **Popular Theater in Palestine Project**

Locations: **West Bank and Gaza**

Implementing Organization: CARE West Bank and Gaza

Type of Programming: Popular theater used as a development tool to promote Civil Society and individual and community rights in Palestine

Target group/beneficiaries: Females, youth, elderly, disabled, unemployed, and other disadvantaged groups.

Stage: Crisis (non-displaced populations in areas of instability, refugee camps, and IDPs)

Environmental Context of the Program

SOCIAL: Basic education is nearly universal in this survey. Figures for basic literacy (87% of household heads literate), net school enrolment (92%), dropout and class repetition compare favorably with many other countries. Problems with basic education are less with parental perceptions of quality of education than with physical concerns. By 2000, the conflict had destroyed 30 schools and forced 41 to close. More than 850,000 children suffer from post traumatic stress disorder associated with the conflict.

CULTURAL/RELIGION: The population (3.1 million) consists of Palestinian Arab and Jewish ethnic groups. Languages spoken include Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Major religions include Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

ECONOMIC: Since 1997 Israel's use of comprehensive closures has decreased and, in 1998, Israel implemented new policies to reduce the impact of closures and other security procedures on the movement of Palestinian goods and labor. These changes fueled an almost three-year long economic recovery in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; real GDP grew by 5% in 1998 and 6% in 1999. Recovery was upended in the last quarter of 2000 with the outbreak of Palestinian violence, which triggered tight Israeli closures of Palestinian self-rule areas and a severe disruption of trade and labor movements.

Political Relationships: The Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (the DOP), signed in Washington on 13 September 1993, provided for a transitional period not exceeding five years of Palestinian interim self-government in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Under the DOP, Israel agreed to transfer certain powers and responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority, which includes the Palestinian Legislative Council elected in January 1996, as part of interim self-governing arrangements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The DOP provides that Israel will retain responsibility during the An intifadah broke out in September 2000 and is ongoing; the resulting widespread violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel's military response, and instability in the Palestinian Authority are undermining progress toward a permanent settlement.

¹ Palestine Ministry of Education report. (November 2000).

Program Description

TARGET GROUP: The goal of popular theatre in Palestine is to promote the human rights and equity among the target groups of women, youth, the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups, and to encourage self-help and effective participation in the arenas of family and civil society in Palestine.

MATERIAL/PHYSICAL RESOURCES: No specific physical infrastructure is required. The theatre group performs in any available venue, e.g., refugee camps, schools, community centers, rural villages, etc. There is no charge or entrance fee required.

FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES: Ashtar Theatre Group, a Palestinian NGO, implements the project and receives funding from a variety of donors.

METHODOLOGY & APPROACH: The goal of popular or forum theatre in Palestine is to promote the human rights and equity and to encourage self-help and effective participation in the arenas of family and civil society in Palestine. Popular theater is used as a development tool in promoting public engagement in civil society and promotion of individual and community rights in Palestine.

Popular Theatre is a conscious intervention that fosters critical collective analysis of shared problems and acts as a rehearsal for individual and collective social action. This type of interactive theatre is rooted in the pedagogical and political principles specific to the popular education method developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.² The key principles of this method are: 1) to see the situation lived by the participants; 2) to analyze the root causes of the situation; and 3) to act to change the situation following the precepts of social justice.

An important feature is that Ashtar conducts three stages of formative research in the development of an *Abu Shaker* script. The first stage is a review of any existing literature; followed by focus group discussions with people like social workers or drug counselors; finally there are interviews with people like victims of incest and drug addicts themselves. Ashtar tries to get real life stories to build into the play being developed, as well as to give Ashtar insight into the nature of the problem and its possible solutions.

The audience participants of a dramatic TIE presentation are also empowered as they are facilitated by the actor/teachers into an animated give and take dialogue with the actor/teachers. Typically, a TIE presentation will include a series of short, 10-15 minute integrated skits. In between, a moderator will come out and engage the audience in a discussion of what they had just experienced. Often, actor/teachers will be called out by the audience, and while staying in character, further explain what was happening in the skit. At times, parts of skits can be recreated with audience participants participating to see if they can influence the situation differently.

A key target of the project is to teach local teachers to use the DIE methodology in their classrooms. DIE is a youth centered methodology that is highly appropriate for in-school work. It facilitates participating youth to learn through self-exploration, co-operation and doing, within sharing, peer centered dramatic settings. These include conflict and its peaceful transformation, bias and prejudice awareness, co-operative problem solving and negotiation, inter-group relations, and listening and communication skills.

² See Friere's book, entitled, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Programming Interventions: Impact and Effectiveness

ACCESS: A key strength of TIE is that it can reach a large numbers of people. However, an essential component of successful TIE work is that the TIE presentation is not done in isolation but is presented as the highlight of a full program containing introductory and follow-up activities centered around the presentation's theme.

The project has had impact beyond immediate or intended beneficiaries. For example, impact on teachers. Ashtar has trained 12 Palestinians (8 regular teachers and 4 “artists” who teach in schools) in forum theater technique. These 12 now teach in schools in Ramallah and in villages near there. They combine forum theatre pedagogy with other more conventional theater in education approaches. Performances based on and inspired by Ashtar and FT are now found in at least some of these schools. Moreover, teachers who saw an *Abu Shaker* performance, even once, yet had had no drama training, attest that they have come to use one or more elements of FT in their regular teaching, simply because they recognize it as an effective and engaging teaching technique.

Women's organization leaders, adult education teachers, social workers, and lawyers providing legal services to women have stated that *Abu Shaker* performances have empowered and influenced both themselves and the Palestinians (often women) that they serve.

QUALITY: The theatre methodology facilitates participants to create a dramatic presentation and then become “actor teachers” by presenting it, in a participatory manner, to their fellow peers and community. The participants are given free reign, within the bounds of the methodology, to create a presentation around key issues and themes of their choice. Consequently, they are free to incorporate appropriate language, manner, music, song, dress etc. to better draw the interest of their fellow peers.

The key method for achieving sustainability of the project's work is through capacity building of local, well established theatre, cultural and other civic groups.

OVERALL PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: There was agreement during interviews and group discussions³ that it is unrealistic to expect behavioral change—especially sustained change—as a result of exposure to a single performance. One refugee camp woman in a group discussion said, “It's easy to get up and act in a play, but not so easy to behave differently with our own families. It's not easy to confront a father or husband or brother.” Indeed, the behavioral change promoted by Ashtar can be said to be constrained by centuries of tradition, the expectations of families and friends, and fear of violence or other negative consequences. The wonder is that any degree of behavioral change is found.

(Forum theatre) is particularly good at addressing sensitive and taboo subjects. It fosters new thinking, democratic values, and realization that there can be multiple solutions to the same problem by changing one's own actions. It also fosters acceptance of diverse points of view. Forum theatre goes to the masses, wherever they are. The approach is informal and low-tech. Ashtar can set up its stage anywhere. It also helps familiarize Palestinians with theatre, something they have little familiarity with.

³ Green, Edward. (2001). Evaluation of Popular Theater in Palestine report. CARE International.

EQUIP1: Building Educational Quality through Classrooms, Schools, and

Communities is a multi-faceted program designed to raise the quality of classroom teaching and the level of student learning by effecting school-level changes. EQUIP1 serves all levels of education, from early childhood development for school readiness, to primary and secondary education, adult basic education, pre-vocational training, and the provision of life-skills. Activities range from teacher support in course content and instructional practices, to principal support for teacher performance, and community involvement for improving school management and infrastructure. EQUIP1 works with food for education issues and contributes to the provision of education and training in crisis and post-crisis environments.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is the lead organization responsible for implementing EQUIP1 and is joined by fourteen outstanding partners: Academy for Educational Development, Aga Khan Foundation USA, CARE, Discovery Channel Global Education Fund, Education Development Center, Howard University, International Reading Association, The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, Juárez & Associates, Inc., Michigan State University, Save the Children, Inc., Sesame Workshop, University of Pittsburgh, and World Education, Inc..

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